
THE ART OF
MASS EFFECT™ 3


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Ashley, Kaidan, and Liara were meant to be love interests throughout all three parts of the trilogy. After taking them away from players in *Mass Effect 2*, they were ready for a passionate return in *Mass Effect 3*. For Ashley's reappearance in the series, we let her hair down and gave her sex appeal, while keeping her in a uniform that introduced the new Alliance colors. Ashley first bumps into Shepard as an Alliance officer on Earth, so her iconic look is a stylish officer's uniform, but later she will don a full set of armor.



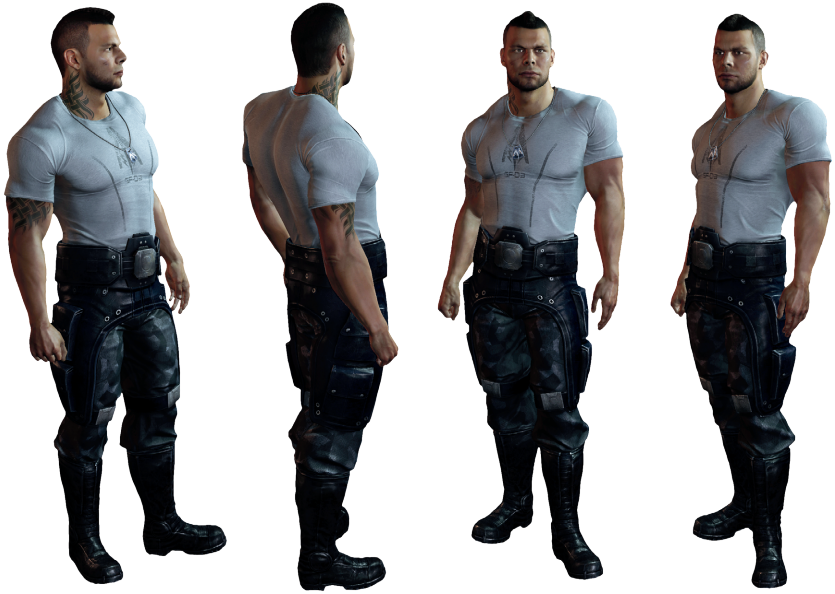




Kaidan's armor in the original *Mass Effect* was hardly memorable. We wanted to change that. The team bulked him up to show that he's seen a lot of action and is ready to fight in the biggest war the galaxy has ever seen. The armor went through many slight changes as we figured out the Alliance colors for human male characters.

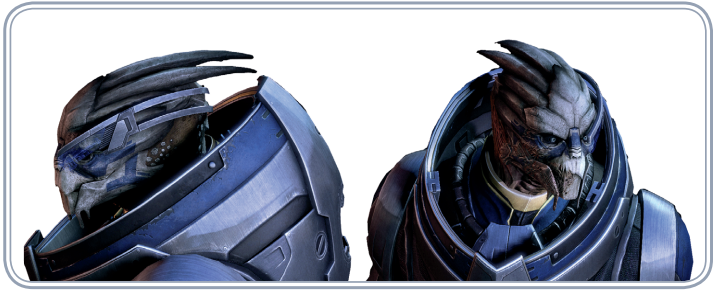
We used Kaidan's head from the first *Mass Effect*, but since the design was more than six years old, we updated his look for *Mass Effect 3*.





The idea for James Vega was to create a blue-collar military officer–a heavy-muscled tank of a man. We gave his armor more heft to imply that James is an unstoppable force. The team added a beard, scars, and tattoos to make him stand out from the other Alliance marines, notably Ash and Kaidan, who are both very clean-cut.



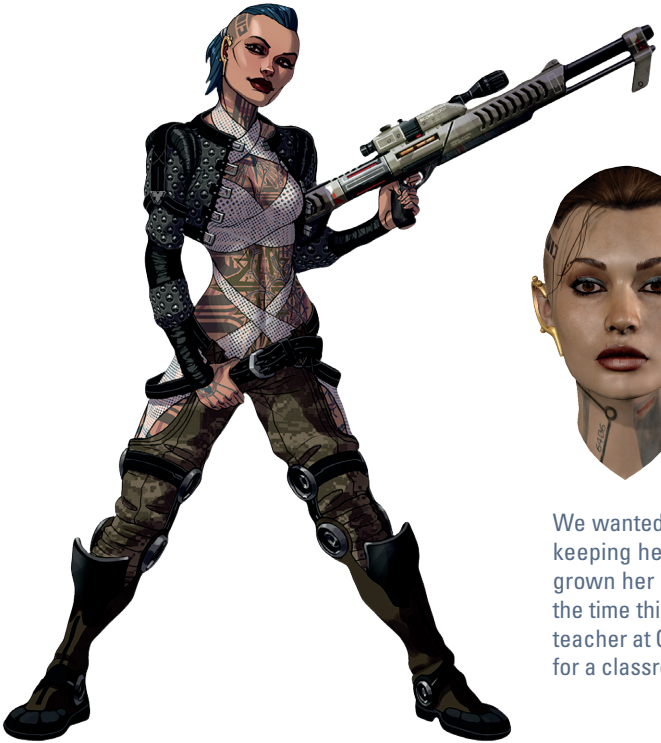


We added silver to Garrus's signature blue-and-black armor to reflect his new rank. His eyepiece was slightly altered, and we added more detail to his armor. The idea was for Garrus to look familiar, but with heavier armor to withstand the battles he'd be facing in *Mass Effect 3*.



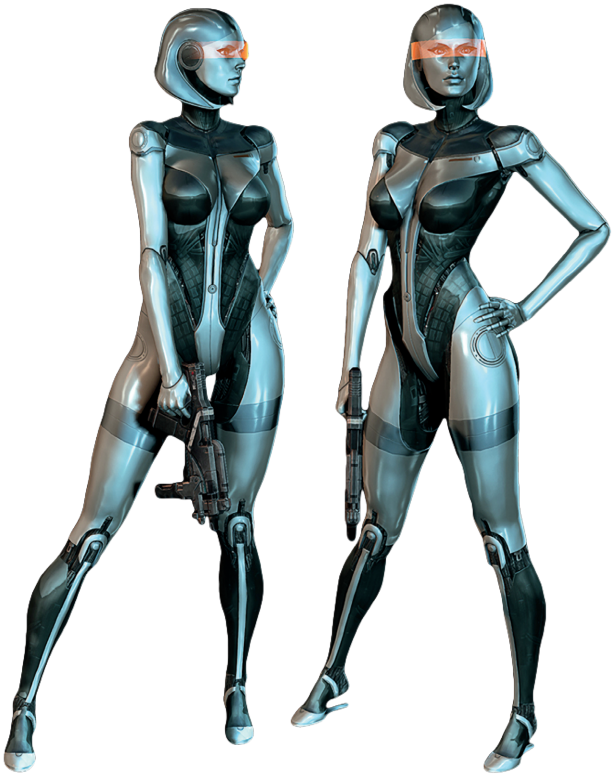


Fans are most familiar with Liara wearing her medical outfit from the first *Mass Effect*, but we instead chose the outfit she wore in the *Lair of the Shadow Broker* downloadable content for *Mass Effect 2*. The jacket is a reminder of her background in science, while the more armor-like pieces get across that the galaxy is at war, and even civilians must join the fight.



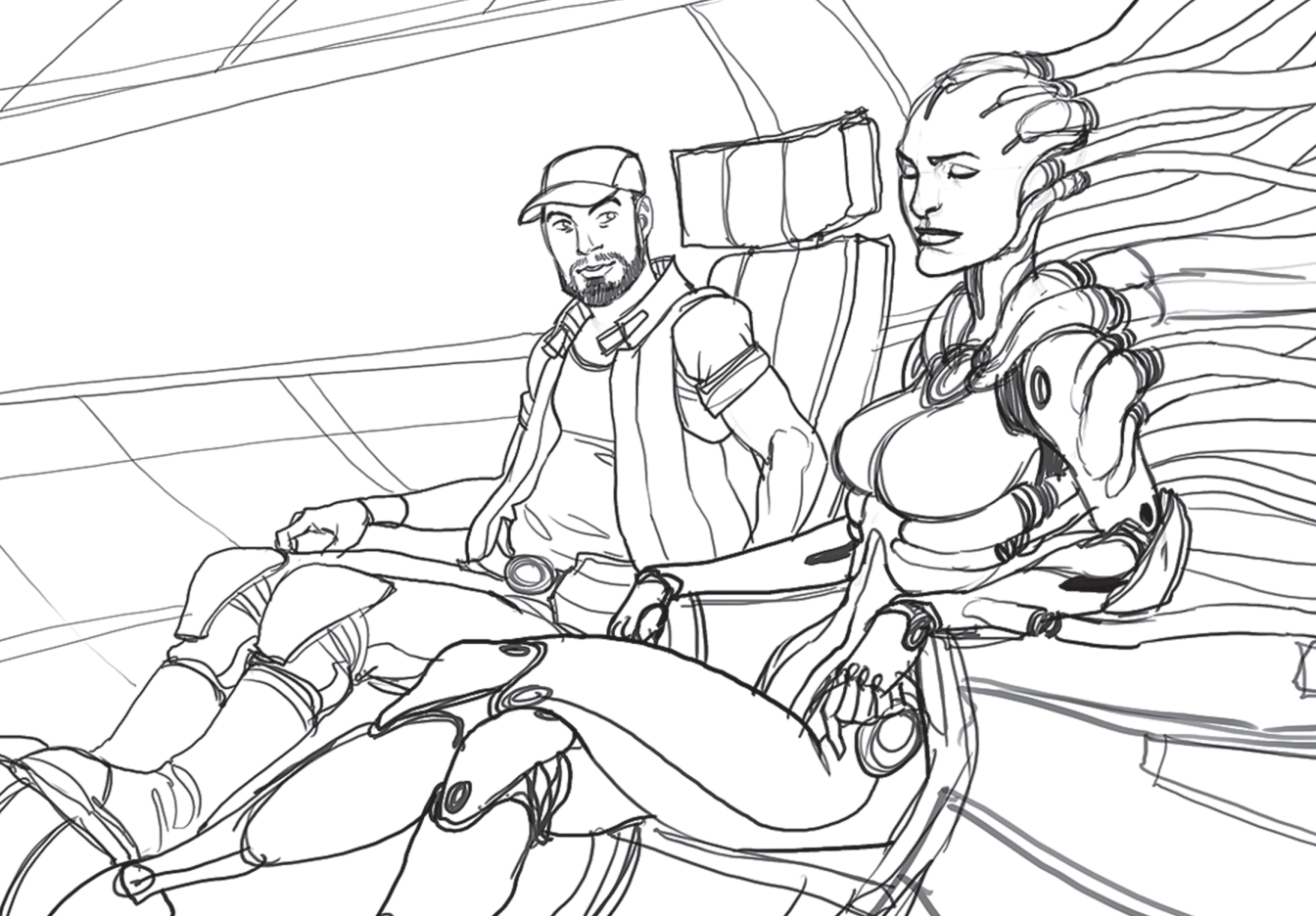


We wanted to show Jack's maturation from *Mass Effect 2* while still keeping her a rebel at heart. She's wearing more clothing and has grown her hair out, but still looks like she's rejecting the system. At the time this concept was made, it was not clear that she would be a teacher at Grissom Academy, so her appearance looks a little unusual for a classroom—not that Jack would ever wear a regulation uniform.



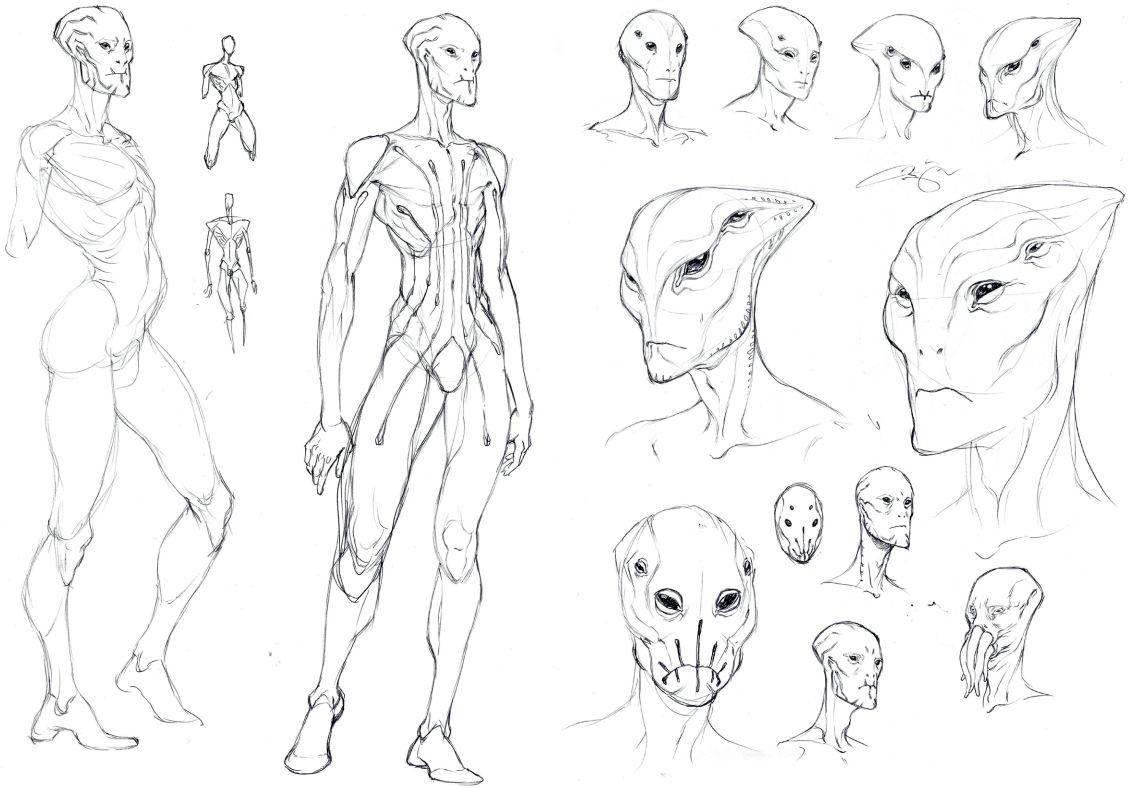


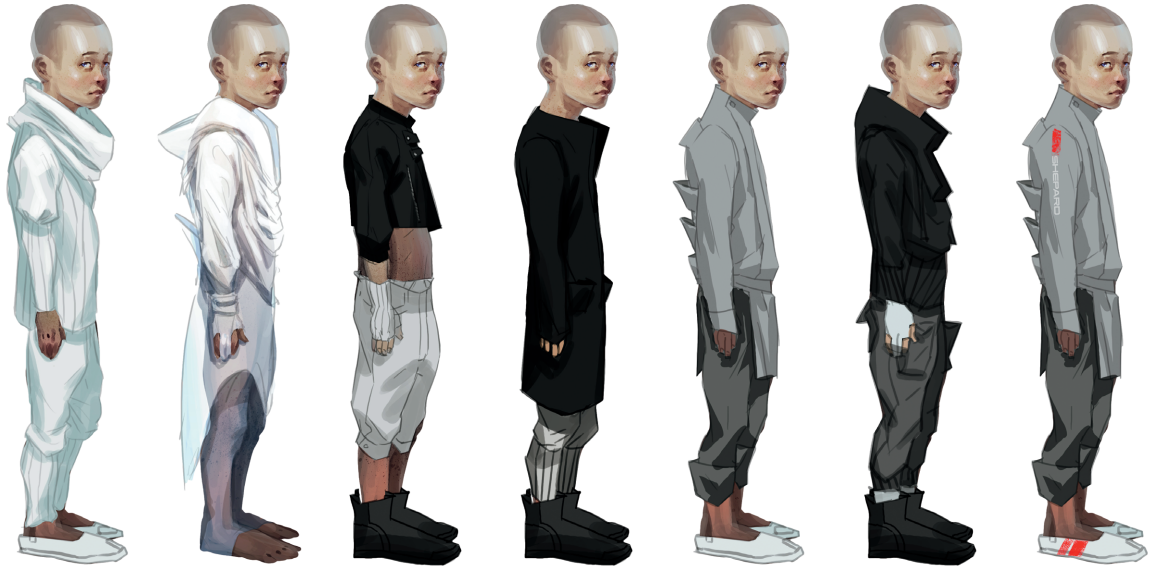
EDI's body needed to be sexy, chrome, and robotic, the *Mass Effect* version of Maria from *Metropolis*. We had a lot of discussion about how robotic she would appear, what her "hair" would look like, and whether or not her face would be expressive. Since the body is an infiltration unit that once had skin over the metal, we decided she should have the same facial effects as the other humans. Otherwise the unit would be easily spotted.





We had numerous designs for the Prothean's armor. It needed to have an ancient feel but still be fantastically high tech. Eventually we steered toward clothing more like a samurai's than the high-tech armor Shepard wears, to suggest the wearer had been in stasis for more than 50,000 years.





One child would be the face of the people on Earth whom Shepard could not save. Above are variations on the child's clothing, which we wanted to feel appropriate for the far future but not so unusual that they would seem out of place on a child today.













Kai Leng, Cerberus's top assassin, was featured in the *Mass Effect* novels. *Mass Effect 3* marks the first time he appears in a game. Early concepts gave him metal legs and hard armor, but this evolved into a stealthier appearance with a coat reminiscent of Thane's. His face and body kept a few obvious cybernetic implants to imply that he'd been modified since the events in the books to become even deadlier.



One of the plans on the drawing board was to have the Illusive Man turn into a Reaper creature for the final battle. Eventually, this plan was scrapped, since we wanted to give players the satisfaction of fighting a character they know rather than a random creature. The design implies that the Illusive Man's weapon is his intelligence, not his physical strength.






Satellite Defence unit-01





The trooper is the most common Cerberus enemy in the game. We decided the armor needed to look more robust than it did in previous games to show that troopers are battle-hardened foes who have fought all kinds of enemies across the galaxy. Common features for all Cerberus enemies were the coloring, rectangular eye slits, and circles over the shoulders and chest. Heavy armor pads over the collarbone completed the tougher look.







The engineer has lighter weapons and armor than the trooper. The class is also capable of detaching a turret from their back and setting it on the field to help cover an area. We used cloth to imply that this class might be easier to bring down than the trooper. This look also suggests they'll use technology and engineering to defeat foes rather than brute force.





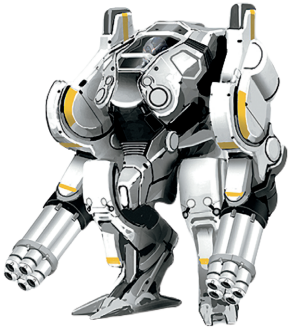
While early versions of the sniper were male, we ultimately decided to make her female to make the sniper's silhouette distinct from other Cerberus enemies. The red lens light was added so she would stand out at a distance.





Rougher versions of the centurion were influenced by the uniforms of real-life bomb-disposal troops. This was eventually toned down to fit the centurion's leadership role. As the gameplay department created weapons for this class, we altered the armor to accommodate things like grenade canisters, matching form with function.

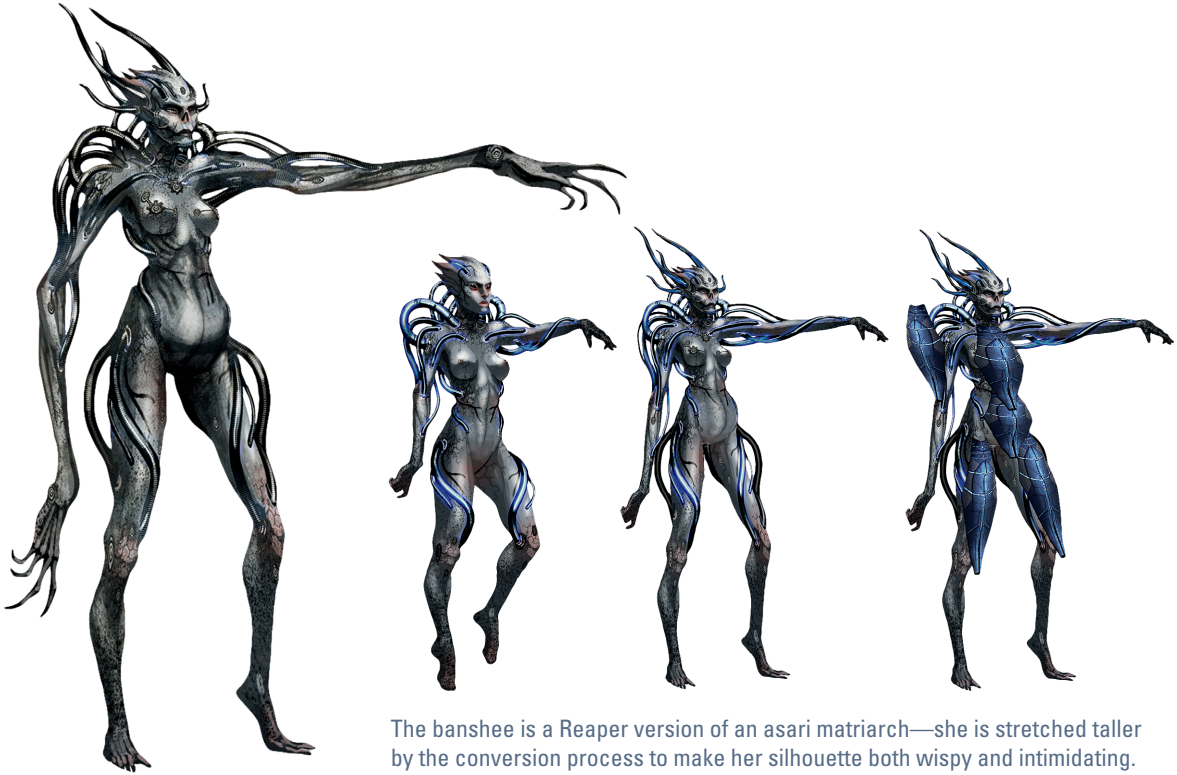






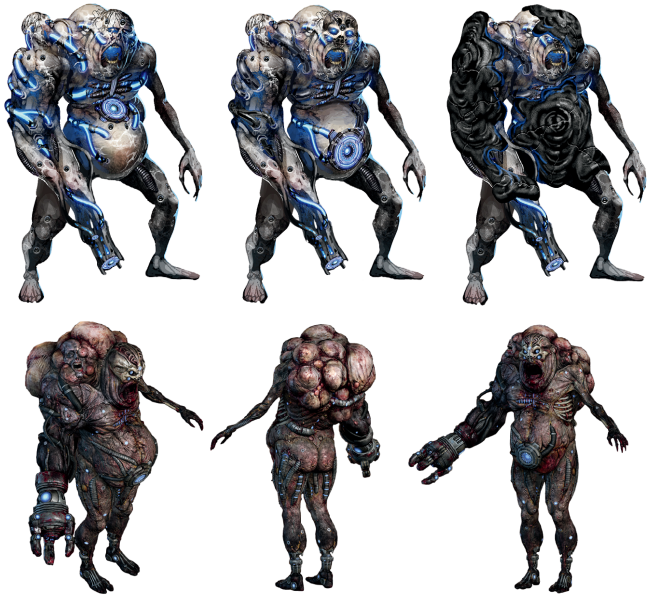


The Atlas went through multiple iterations. An early version cast the Atlas as a heavy *Mass Effect 2* YMIR mech with a soldier inside. Eventually, a canopy was added to protect the soldier, and we made the Atlas larger than the YMIR.



The banshee is a Reaper version of an asari matriarch—she is stretched taller by the conversion process to make her silhouette both wispy and intimidating.





The cannibal is a Reaper version of a batarian with a human corpse for an arm. The corpse's legs fuse with a large gun. This seemed appropriate storywise, as the Reapers' early fronts during the invasion were in batarian and human space.



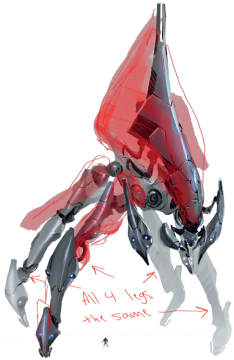
The brute was named to suggest its appearance: a large enemy with an oversized claw, able to pick up and mash Shepard into the ground. The krogan were a perfect species to use as a model. We decided to swap out the krogan head for something turian, making for a grisly synthesis of two species whose planets were closely linked in the invasion plan. The exposed vital organs were appropriately repulsive, but we ultimately added armor plating that could be blown off, making the brute extremely tough.





To kill or spare the rachni queen was one of the player's biggest decisions in the first *Mass Effect*, and we knew early on we wanted to bring the species back. Early versions had a human corpse turned into a gun mounted on the creature. When this was deemed too disgusting, we added large sacs that could be punctured, releasing miniature rachni. We're not sure if this is actually more palatable, but it made for more interesting gameplay.









For the third game, we decided to make a smaller version of a Reaper that could land on planets and actually do battle with Shepard. It may not look it, but this destroyer is only about 160 meters high in the game, compared to two kilometers for Sovereign.

The original shape for Sovereign was based on a leaf insect nymph, which give these Reapers their distinctive silhouette.

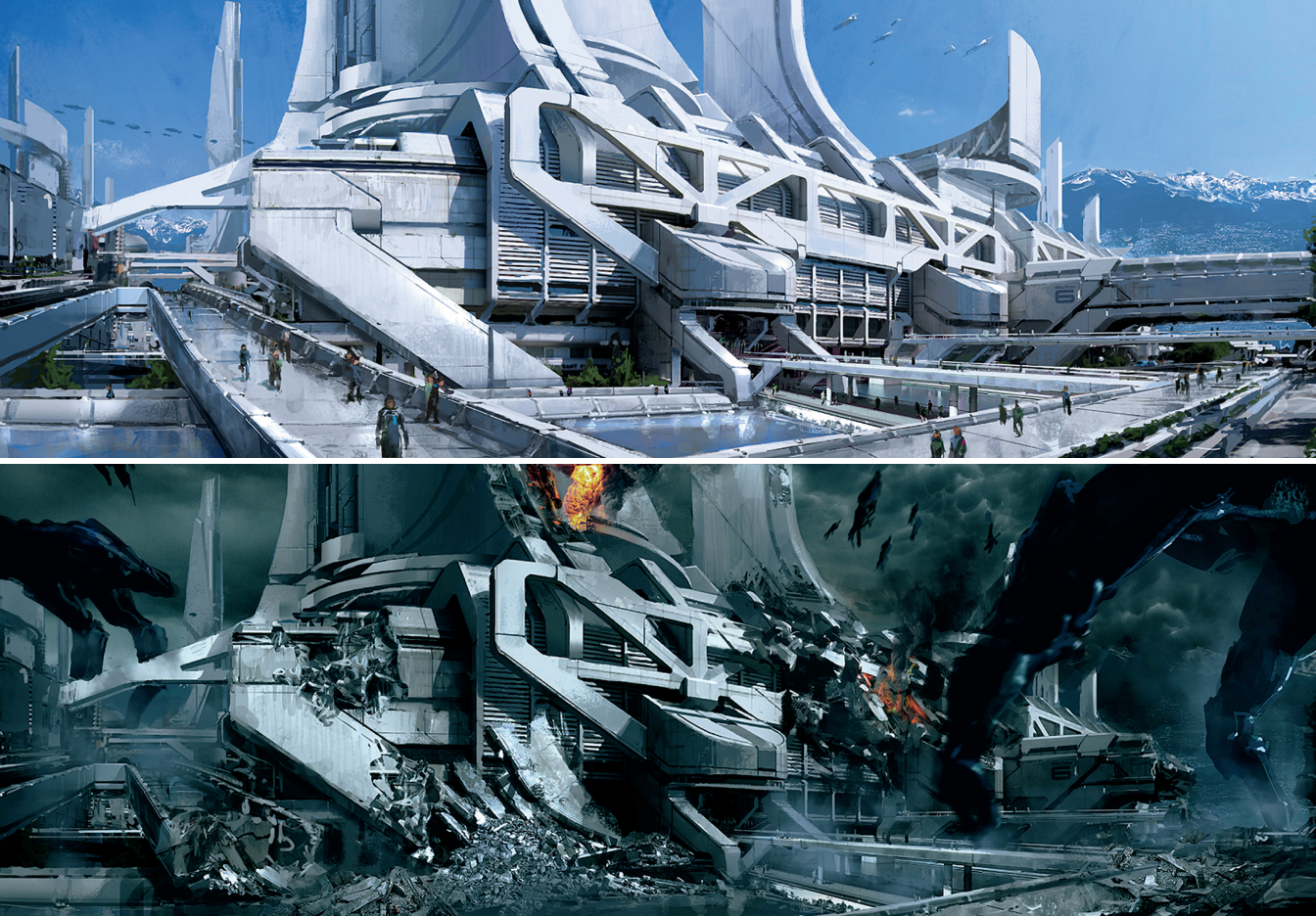




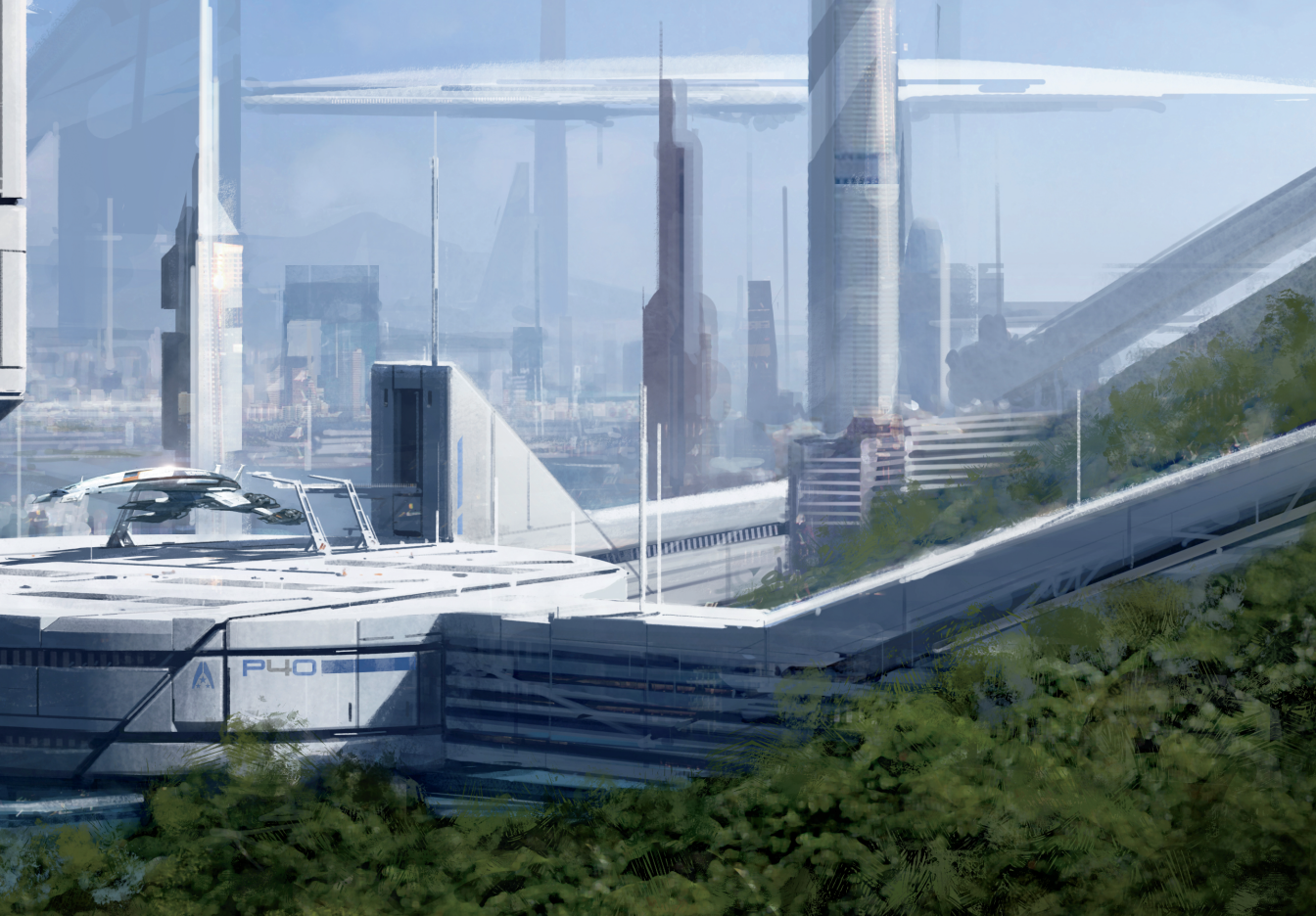


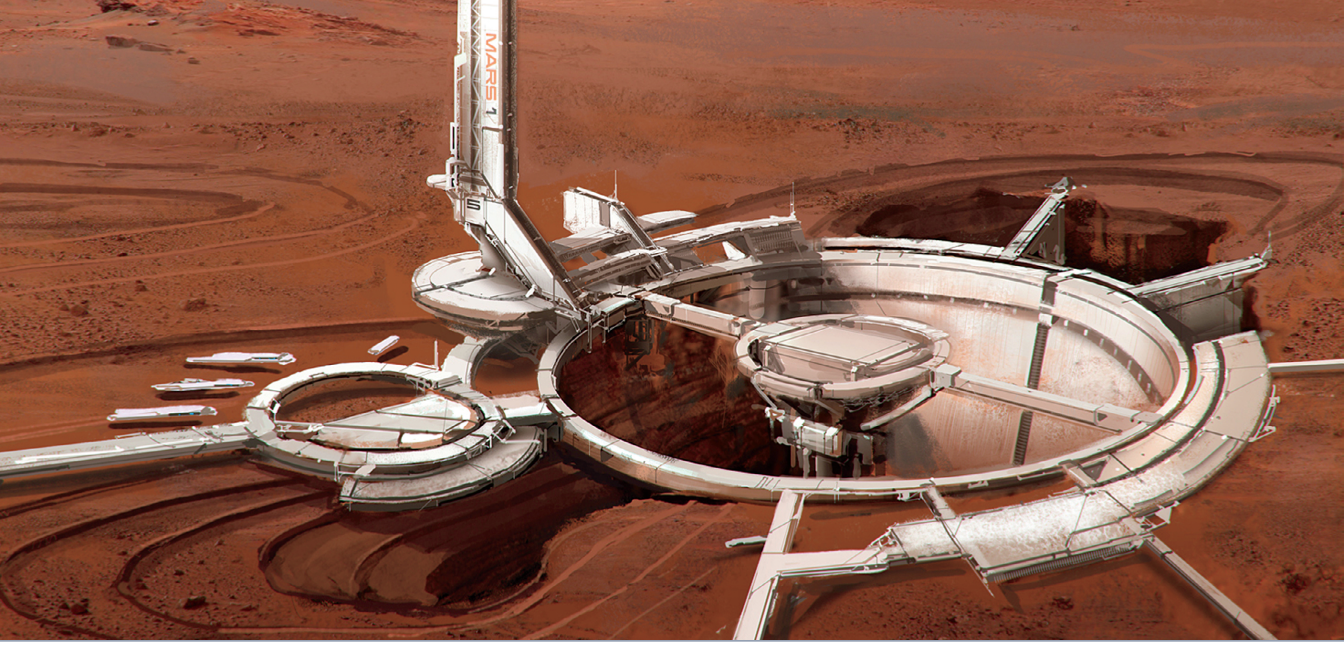



Earth was an exciting level to design for *Mass Effect 3*, because it marks the first time in the trilogy that Shepard visits the planet. We knew we wanted a beautiful harbor setting and kicked around many ideas for the city, including Rio de Janeiro and Hong Kong. In the end, we stayed closer to home, choosing Vancouver. These concepts show the process of designing an iconic look that wouldn't conflict with the alien architecture that was already in place. We blended large curves with strong 45-degree angles and added a slightly weathered look with human signage to make it familiar.






P40



After Earth, Mars was probably the second most exciting planet to design. We knew it would have human architecture, and we wanted to capture the realistic feel of a drill site on the red planet, excavating Prothean secrets of the Mars archive. We kept the base quite low to the ground to help it survive sandstorms and other harsh Martian weather, and went with a circular design that supported a large drilling shaft down the middle. The large spokes coming off the circle serve as docking stations for shuttles and rovers.









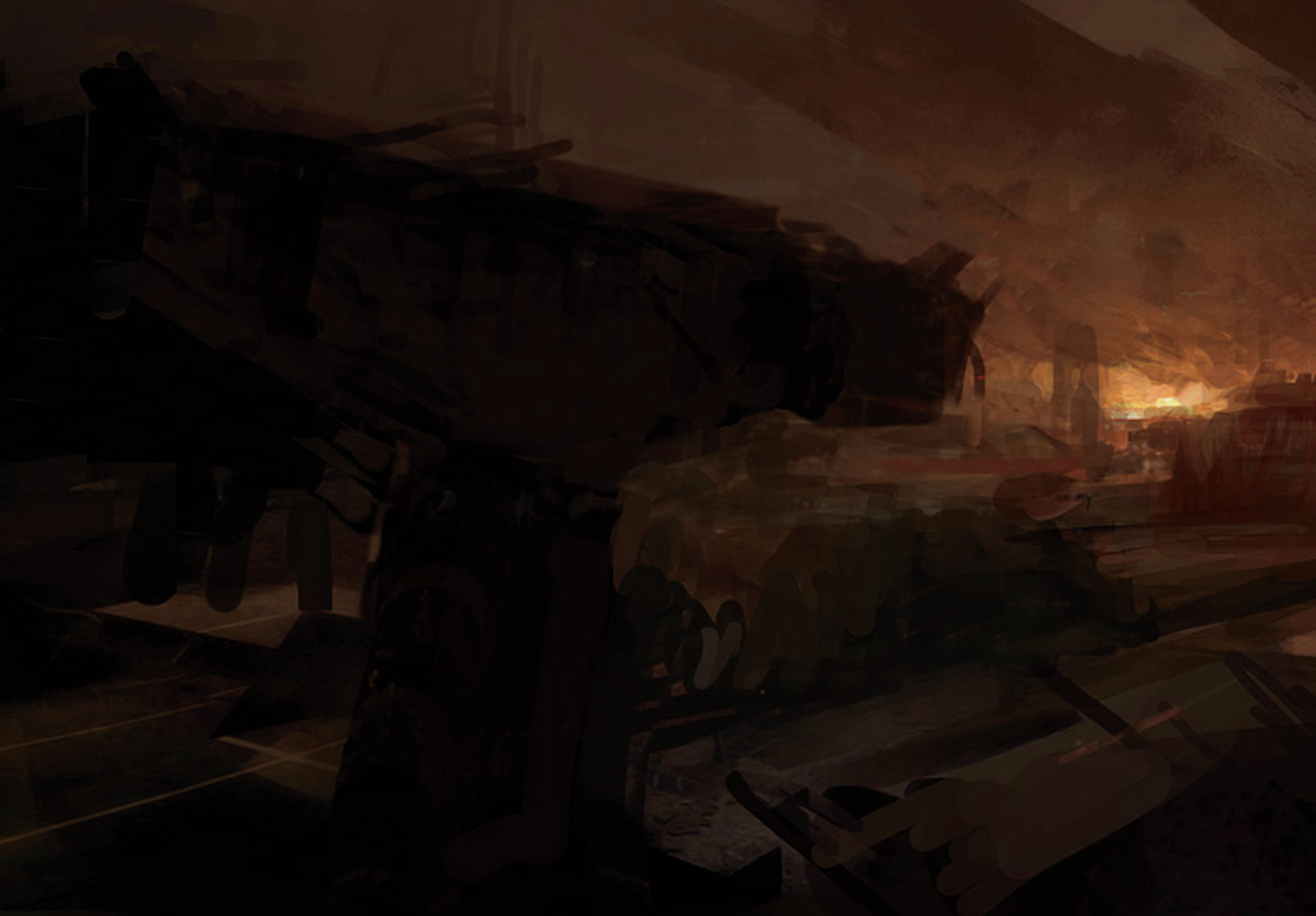
Sur'Kesh, the salarian home world, had to harbor an amphibious species. We went with a lush, tropical jungle that implied humidity. We thought the large curves of the structures mimicked some of the more organic shapes in salarian armor and clothing. The actual inspiration for this building was a shopping center in Istanbul. We intentionally designed the interiors to blur the line between the landscape and the structure, which helped give the base a very open and inviting feeling. The rubble is the result of Cerberus dropping in a commando team, turning the idyllic building into a battleground.





Tuchanka was well established in *Mass Effect 2* as a bomb-blasted planet that was mostly rubble. The above image was a very early concept showing what Reaper walkers invading the planet might look like. The lost krogan city on the facing page was meant to evoke the feeling that the krogan were worth saving, and that they once created things of beauty before their society crumbled and and the krogan nearly became extinct. We showed minor battle damage as well as sparse foliage to imply that life had a small, fragile hope of persisting, even in the midst of mass destruction.



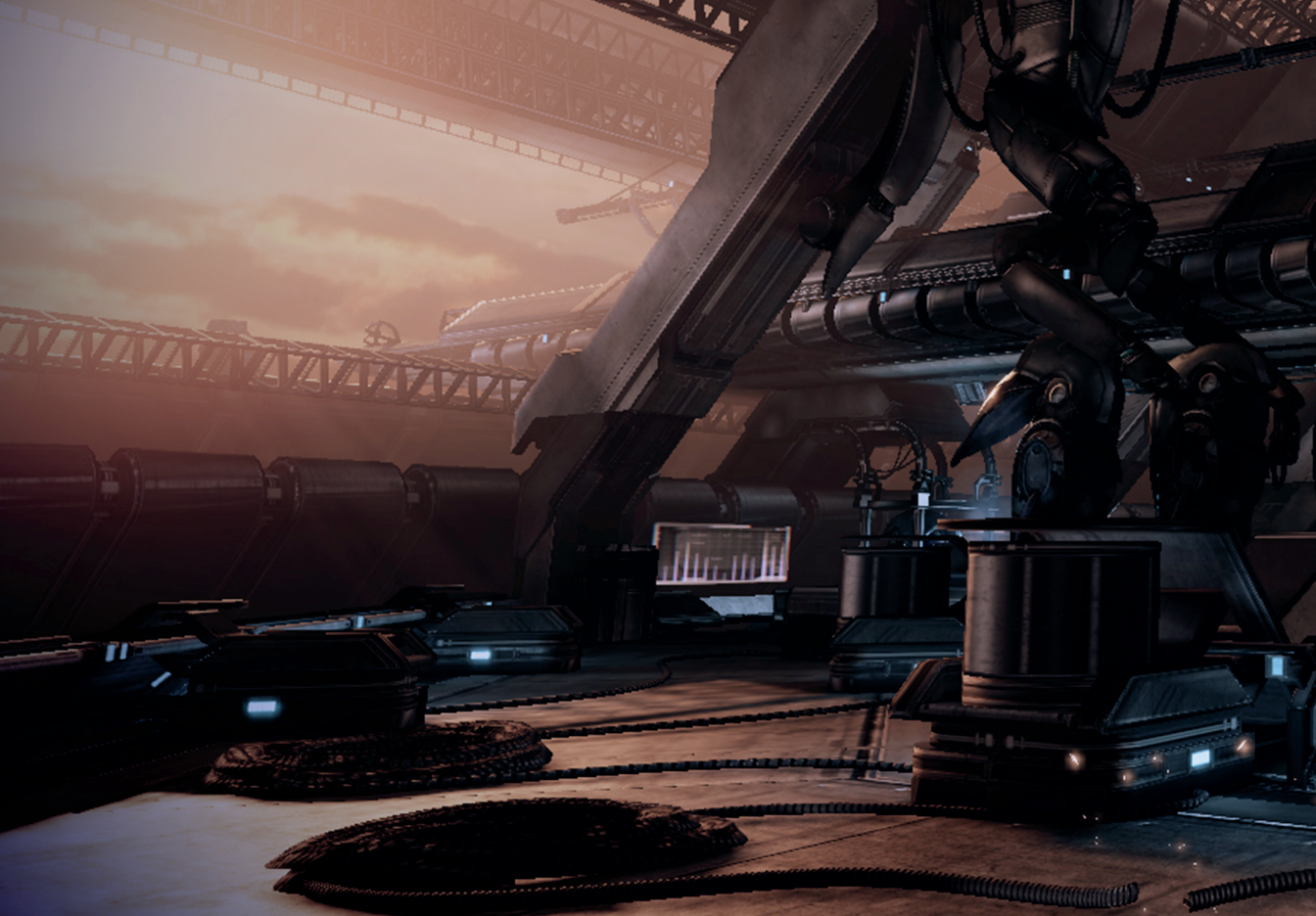




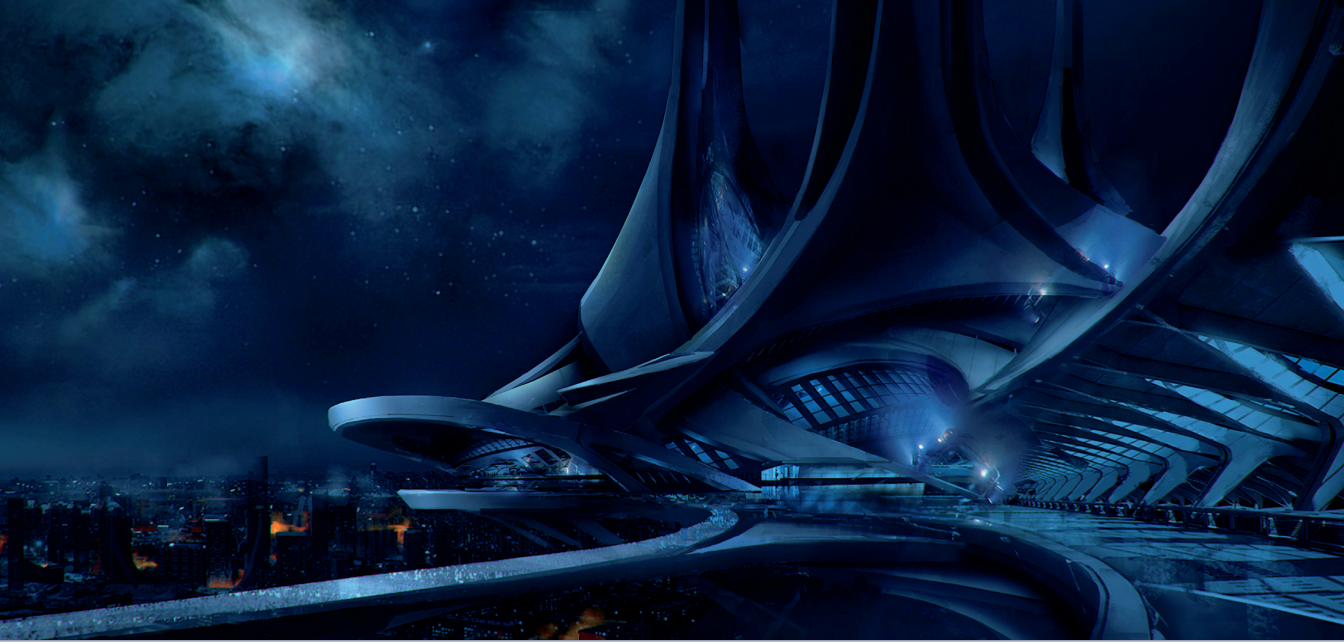


The challenge for Rannoch, the quarian homeworld, was to create a place that seemed consistent with two alien styles: quarian architecture, seen on the Migrant Fleet, and geth architecture, introduced by the geth occupation of the quarian planet centuries prior. We decided to keep Rannoch's quarian environments industrial looking, with modular stainless-steel sections similar to the Lloyd's of London building. The interiors and exteriors were meant to blend—there was no hard line between the two.

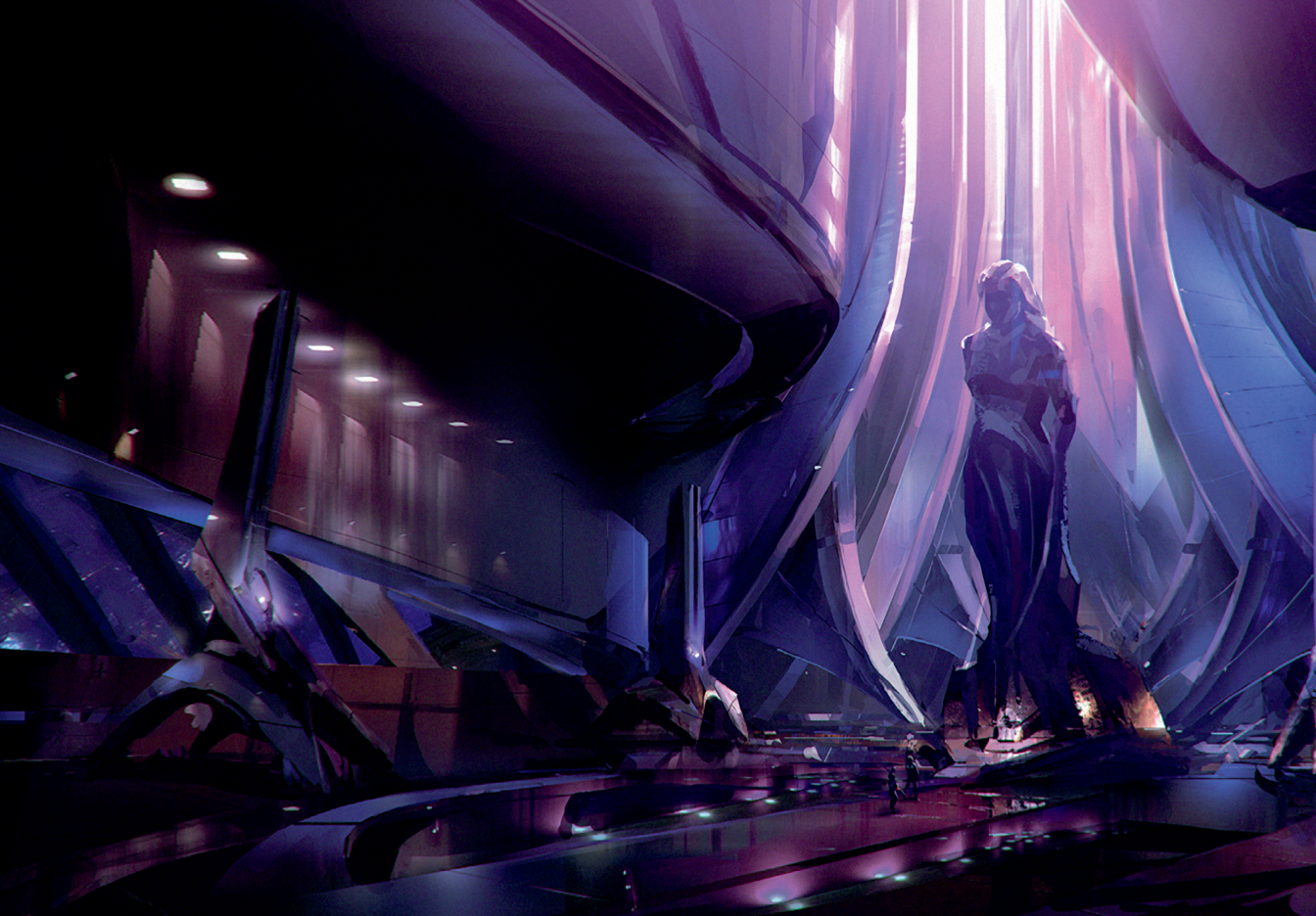


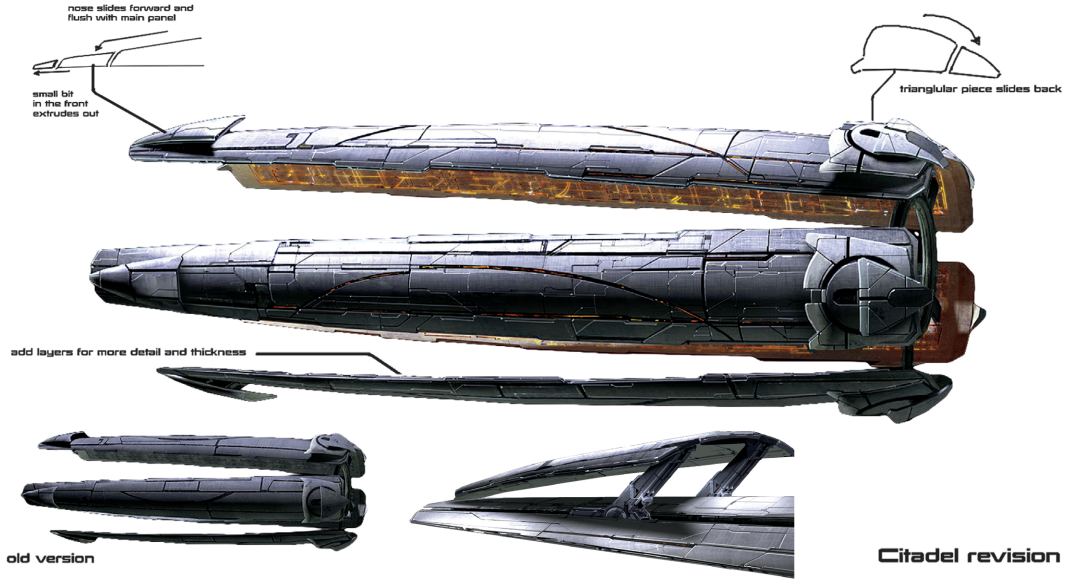






In previous games, players visited asari-influenced worlds, so we knew how to style the asari homeworld for *Mass Effect 3*. The architecture has a lot of large, swooping curves, reminiscent of the work of architect Santiago Calatrava. The above image is an early concept for Thessia that did not show the battle damage from a Reaper invasion that eventually made it into *Mass Effect 3*. The concept on the facing page is for the asari temple on Thessia, which includes upward-swooping lines like a cathedral. The lower images show some of the battle damage added to the planet to tie it to the Reaper attack.





We had seen the Citadel in the previous two games, but we needed a few more concepts to show the station from a new angle in *Mass Effect 3*. The image on the facing page is a concept for the keeper tunnels that were never used, where the creatures would walk around to maintain the station. The blue pads used mass-effect fields to keep the outer skin of the ward arms separate from the rest of the structure so it could shrug off incredible impacts during battle.



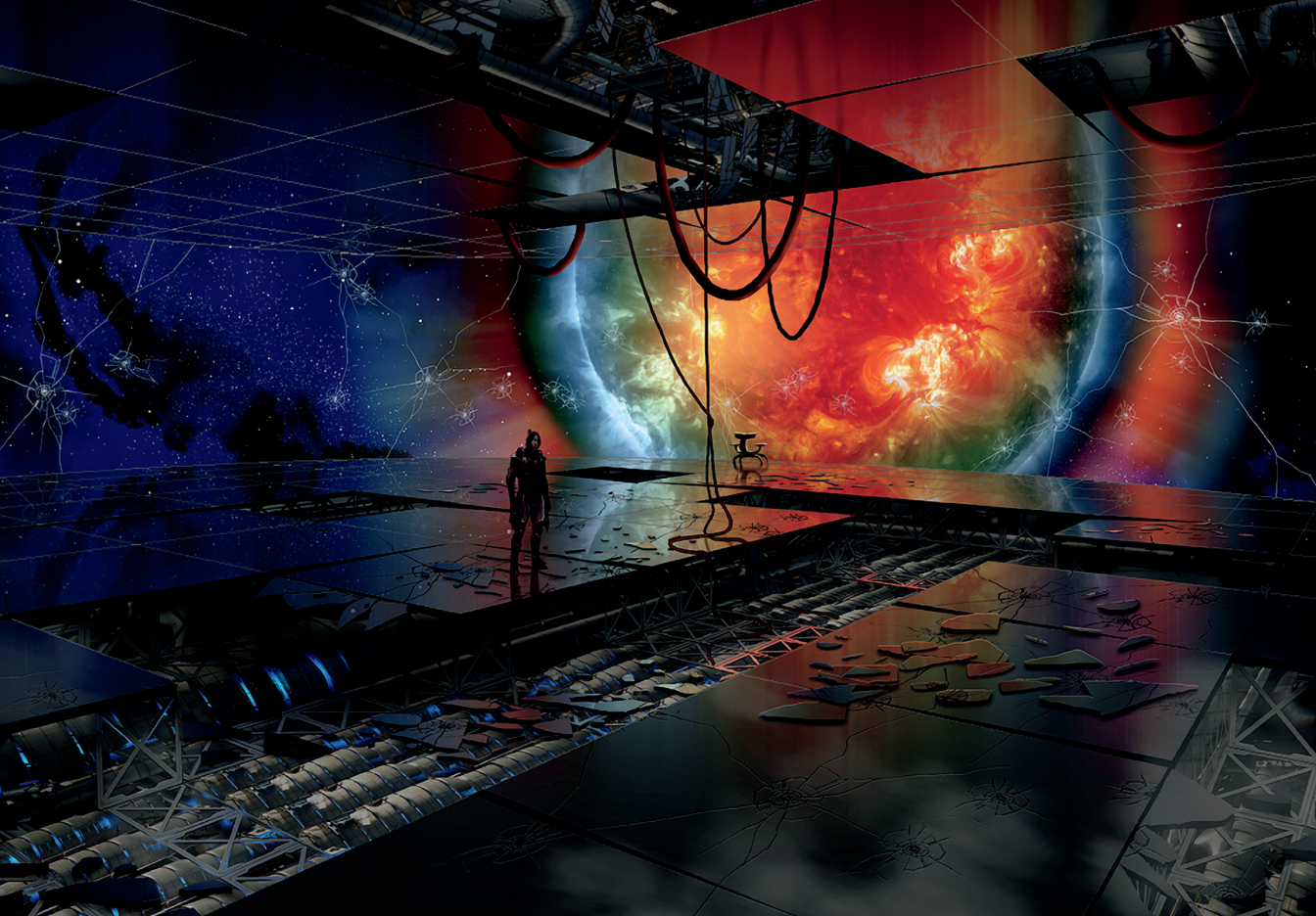


The top image is an early concept of a turian outpost, created when we were trying to get a handle on their design. We knew what their ships looked like, but not their architecture. The below two images were made after it was decided that the turians would have a base on Menae, Palaven's moon, from which they could organize a counter-attack on the Reapers. The turian structures were designed to be portable military fortifications that could be set up hastily.





These are early concepts imagining the Cerberus headquarters. The top image represents a version in which the Illusive Man is not viewing a hologram but instead has a window that looks out at a dying star. The image on the facing page envisions what the room would look like following a violent confrontation.

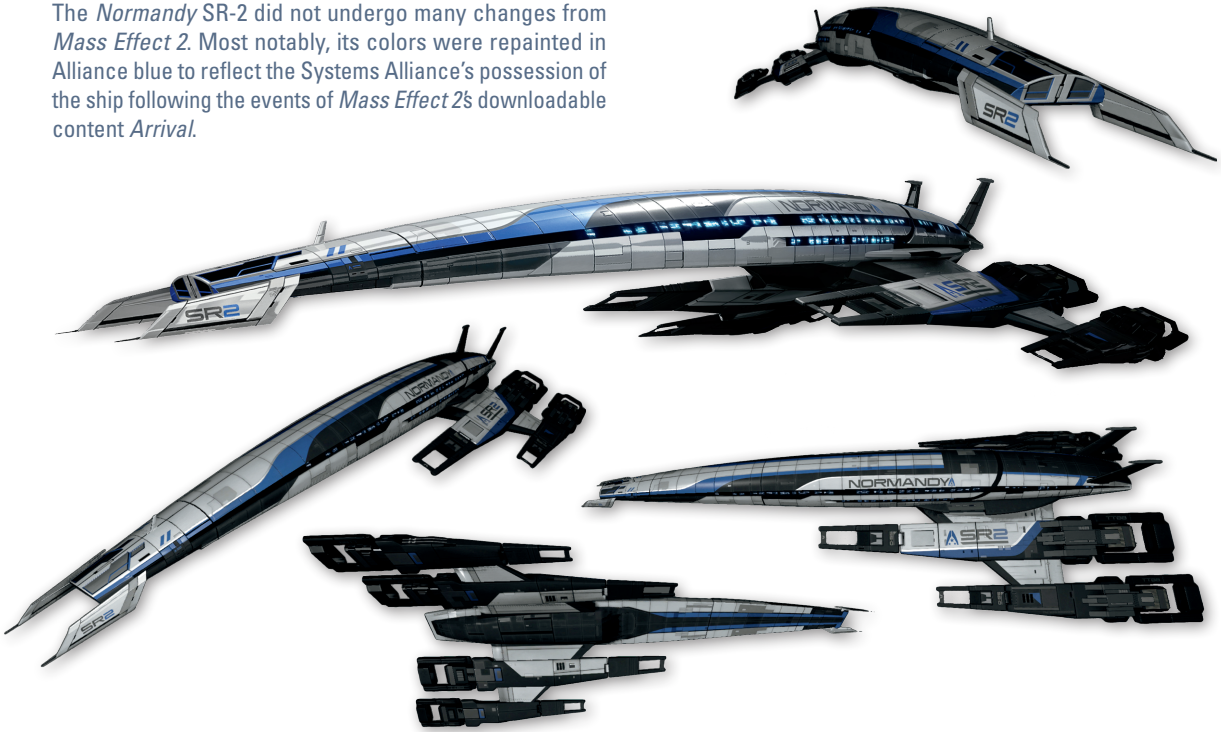


This is what the final room might have looked like if Shepard fought him in this space. The concept is meant to show the moment right before the confrontation, during which Shepard is walking past the bodies of the last of the Illusive Man's Cerberus troops.

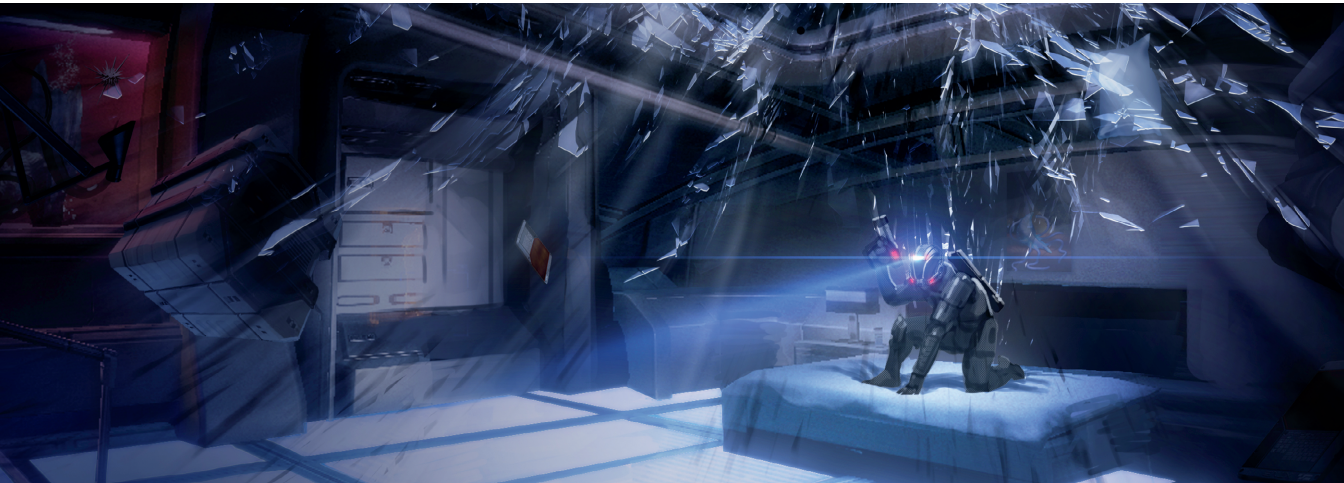




The *Normandy* SR-2 did not undergo many changes from *Mass Effect 2*. Most notably, its colors were repainted in Alliance blue to reflect the Systems Alliance's possession of the ship following the events of *Mass Effect 2*'s downloadable content *Arrival*.













The human ships in the original *Mass Effect* had red and white detailing. As production progressed on *Mass Effect 3*, we decided that Alliance colors should instead be blue and white. These ships were to be featured heavily in the final battle scenes.




caution











We created the omni-blade to make melee combat as exciting as gunplay. The blade is similar to the omni-tool from the previous games, but it is not entirely holographic. In *Mass Effect 3*, the omni-tool uses an ultrafast fabricator to manufacture a disposable blade almost instantly.


N7


N7


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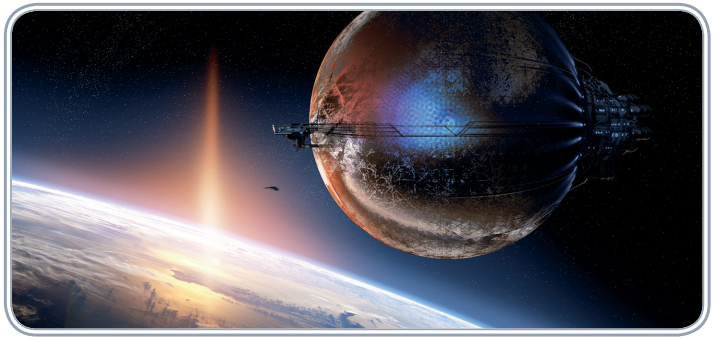








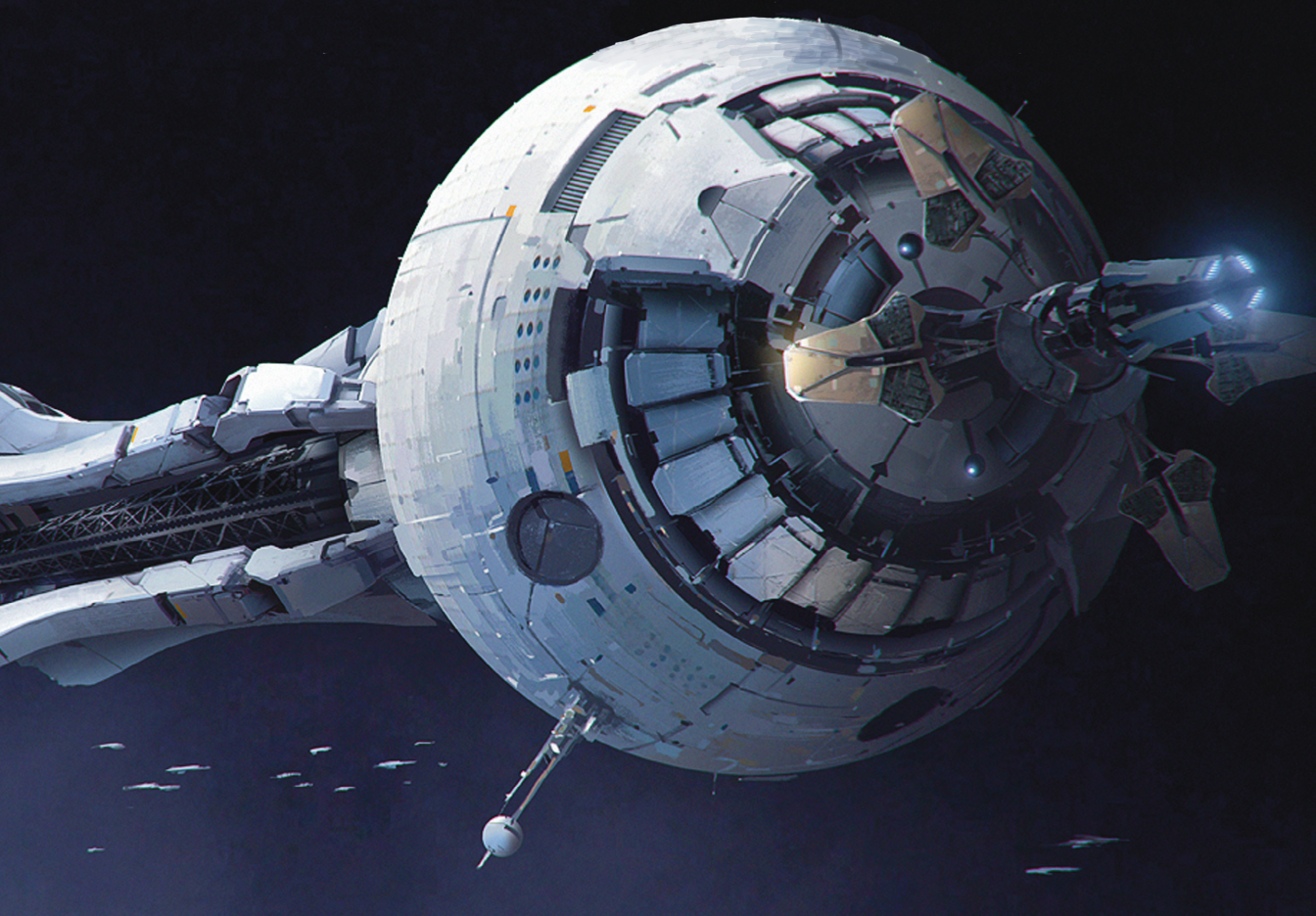






The Crucible is meant to evoke an enormous, rocket-propelled bomb: something like a cross between the Trinity bomb and a NASA space probe.





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